



City of Seattle

Mike McGinn, Mayor

Seattle Office for Civil Rights

Julie Nelson, Director

March 2, 2010

To: Mary Denzel, Deputy City Auditor

From: Julie Nelson

Subject: Audit of Seattle's Enforcement of Bias Crimes

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report regarding Seattle's Enforcement of Bias Crimes. I appreciate the documentation of the City's progress in implementing the recommendations made in 2008 to improve the City's response to hate crimes, bias incidents and malicious harassment. It is important for the City to have a strong response to bias crimes.

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) and representatives from the Seattle Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Commission support the recommendations you have put forth. In particular, assigning a coordinator would help to ensure a strong and strategic response to hate crimes and incidents across all City departments, including not only criminal justice, but also community building and educational outreach efforts. We also support the recommendation to expand the roles of SOCR and the commissions to include hate crime and hate incident outreach, education and prevention. This recommendation is consistent with our mission, and we welcome opportunities to expand efforts in this regard.

Overall, we in the City have made a good faith effort to improve our response to hate crimes and bias incidents. I appreciate Seattle Police Department (SPD) efforts to increase the accuracy of Seattle's bias attack data which will allow the City to better understand, respond to, and report on the incidence of bias attacks. I have a few comments in regards to specific recommendations, as follows.

Recommendation 2 – Improve community, SPD and City cooperation on bias crime reporting.

In 2009, SOCR, SHRC and the LGBT Commission sponsored and supported events to educate the community about protections against hate crimes, bias crimes and malicious harassment in Seattle. SHRC was successful in adding homelessness as a protected class to the City's Malicious Harassment Ordinance and is currently working to add similar protections at the state level. In addition, SOCR and SHRC created a hate crimes wallet card to inform homeless people of the new protections, and distributed the cards to homeless shelters and organizations. The LGBT Commission also worked with the King County Prosecutor's Office, SPD and a number of LGBT organizations to create and distribute a hate crime card. Early this year, both Commissions supported SPD's Fight the Fear Campaign in response to the South Park attack of a lesbian couple that resulted in the death of one of the women.

SOCR should be included in efforts to educate the community about hate crimes, bias incidents and malicious harassment reporting. Allocation of resources to provide the needed support and coordination across departments would assist.

Recommendation 8 – Publish reports on both incident and bias crimes.

Although the SPIDER system can now generate raw data reports on bias incidents as well as bias crimes, the data discrepancies highlighted by your report indicate the need for dedicated staff to continue to monitor data collection and data accuracy. I believe that the City would benefit from allocating resources for staff resources to review the data and present reports on a regular basis to Council, the Mayor and Seattle residents. Both SHRC and the LGBT Commission strongly support this recommendation. An example of another civil rights agency that produces such a report is the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission:

http://humanrelations.co.la.ca.us/hatecrime/data/2008%20Hate%20Crime%20Report%2011-12-09_08-09.pdf.

Recommendation 10 – Appoint an internal City coordinator for cross-departmental efforts to address bias attacks.

As resources become available, we recommend expanded roles for SOCR and Commissions to include hate crime and hate incident outreach, education and prevention, and that the resources be provided to increase our capacity to provide these services. If this recommendation is implemented, then it would make sense to house the Citywide coordinator within SOCR. The coordinator then would be able to work effectively with the Commissions, other community organizations, and law enforcement agencies.

I recognize the difficulty of implementing any recommendations that require allocation of additional resources in the current budget climate. This, of course, heightens the importance of SOCR and the commissions' long-term and sustained effort to eradicate hate crimes. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 233-7822.